GAYS, BACKERS CELEBRATE

KEVIN KRECK, THE GAZETTE

Nick Bush, left, and Paul McCardy celebrate downtown Sunday during PrideFest. The festivities included a parade, speeches, vendors, food booths and a beer garden.

Dozen same-sex couples return to exchange vows

By ANDREA BROWN
THE GAZETTE

Darlene Runge wore a lacy white wedding dress and veil. Her intended dressed in a dapper black suit.

The Englewood couple came to downtown Colorado Springs on Sunday to get married.

The minister joined them together in love, but not by law.

They were among a dozen same-sex couples exchanging vows in a ceremony at Acacia Park during PrideFest. The annual celebration of the local gay community included a parade, speeches, vendors, food booths and a beer garden.

"I have the right to wear a traditional wedding dress just as much as another bride does," said Runge, 51, clasping a bouquet of flowers.

Added her partner, Cathy House, 43, "And if I may say so, I think I make a very handsome groom."

Sharing the stage were 12 couples from last year's 50-couple group nuptials who returned to renew their vows.

"It's a good way to celebrate our anniversary," said Denver resident Tim Johnson.

Not everyone shared their bliss.

"It's pretty decadent stuff that's going on in there," said Robert Behn, among the religious pickets at park entrances.

Behn came here from Buffalo, N.Y., to protest with Operation Save America.

"We're hoping that some of those people will come out of that lifestyle," he said. "The Bible calls it abomination." He wasn't finding many takers for his pamphlets.

"People's minds are pretty well set," said Behn, whose Colorado itinerary includes visiting abortion clinics.

A few shouting matches erupted.

"Go back to your church," Wayne Farris told protesters.

"They terrorize people," Farris said. "This is a day people should come out and have pride, but they are being called detestable."

Colorado Springs Mayor Lionel Rivera, who typically issues proclamations for city events, declined to issue a PrideFest proclamation for the second year in a row.

But City Councilman Richard Skorman

SEE PRIDEFEST • PAGE 4

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PUBLIC NOTICE

The City of Colorado Springs, Planning and Community Development Department, Urban Redevelopment Division has completed a draft of the North Nevada Avenue Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) and intends to submit to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for review and approval. Copies of the draft may be obtained from the Urban redevelopment Division office located at 704 E. Boulder Street. The NRSA draft can also be accessed via the City's web site Springsgov.com under Urban Redevelopment Division.

Citizens are invited to comment, in writing, on the proposed NRSA through August 17, 2005. Comments may be forwarded to Janet Risley at 704 E. Boulder Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80903.

For more information, please call the Urban Development Division office at (719) 385-6876, Fax number (719) 632-0791.

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Normal sounds of playing children" is another neighbor's impression of the house. "Boys on skateboards," is echoed repeatedly.

One neighbor recalls hearing an occasional argument coming from the house, but nothing unusual or alarming.

The house looks like any other in the neighborhood — actually its yard is better-groomed than the overgrown weeds of the house next door. There are three skateboards in the driveway, and the bottom of the garage door is scuffed from repeated bumping and grinding.

Inside, one wall is covered with dozens of framed photos showing happy family memories. Similar framed photos are arranged on tables and counters.

The overriding impression is that the home — a split-level built in 1985 with five bedrooms and two baths and comes in at 1,600 square feet — is probably a bit claustrophobic for a family of six, especially with three growing boys. But it's well-kept.

Garcia and her children don't come off as residents of Animal House.

Garcia could be any 35-year-old woman with four children — including her look of being a bit overwhelmed and, at times, overrun by her brood.

Her mood now is subdued, even fearful, as she discusses the five counts of child abuse and contributing to the delinquency of a minor she and Collins each face.

Kimberly could be anyone's rebellious 16-year-old with her lip-piercing and black AC/DC T-shirt. And she's lived the part, having been expelled from her Wichita, Kan., high school as a freshman for smoking marijuana. But she is pleasant, polite and soft-spoken.

Words such as "embarrassed" and "ashamed" and "poor judgment" and "mistake" pour from their mouths — against the advice of Garcia's attorney, who urged her not to speak publicly.

Garcia said she agreed to speak because she wants people to know she's not a monster.

"This is a nightmare," Garcia said.

So what happened July 9?

Garcia said she and Collins had a few drinks that night before they went upstairs, turned on the window air conditioner, and went to bed.

With the adults asleep, Kimberly said she went to the kitchen, got out the frozen liqueur and started taking shots with her boyfriend and her 14-year-old brother.

"I never meant for the young ones to drink," Kimberly said. "I don't even remember them drinking."

But drink they did, said police. Sgt. Howard Black said their blood-alcohol levels were so high the boys could have died.

The thought horrifies Garcia. But she insists she never gave booze or cigarettes to her children.

"The kids took it upon themselves to drink," she said. "It wasn't innocent. It was kids trying to get away with something. This was not something they had permission to do."

pelled for smoking pot. Liquor, was never an issue. I didn't think there was any reason to lock it up."

That kind of attitude is common, experts say, and is part of the reason there are so many adolescent alcoholics and drug addicts.

"This family sounds like most of my caseload," said Eric Schewe, a family counselor with Therapeutic Outpatient Services. "It's not that uncommon. Substance abuse is pretty common among teenagers."

And it's not a problem that is isolated to one child.

"They can drag a family down real quick," Schewe said.

In fact, a teen can unintentionally put a family through extreme turmoil, he said.

"I have families from the Broadmoor and families from the 'hood," Schewe said. "I have single-parent families and two-parent families. I've got 13-year-old alcoholics. It's not that uncommon."

Kimberly said she never imagined the trouble she would create by drinking booze and giving it to her friend and brothers.

"If I could, I would take it all back," Kimberly said. "It's just not worth it."

Garcia admits her family has problems. She has been in counseling with Kimberly since her expulsion from high school. She said she quit her full-time job as a caregiver to old and sick people two years ago when Kimberly got into trouble. She wanted to be available to help her daughter as she went through drug rehabilitation.

And the boys?

"They can be pretty wild," she said.

But she insists they are all good kids and she is committed to learning from the mistakes of July 9, taking advantage of the intervention by police, prosecutors and social workers to get her family under control.

"This is awful; a nightmare," Garcia said. "But I see it as God helping us and guiding us. We need to fix things.

"The kids are scared. The

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PRIDEFEST: Councilman Skorman rides in parade

FROM PAGE 1

rode in the PrideFest parade that followed the wedding ceremony.

"After all these elections and the (gay) marriage issue, it is more important now for elected officials to stand up for decency and for people's rights," Skorman said.

"It is great for people to come together and not feel afraid, not feel ashamed and to feel proud of who they are and express their love for their families and loved ones."

The parade was led by someone decked out as the SpongeBob SquarePants cartoon character. Parade entries ranged from banks and car dealers to the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association and Dykes on Trykes.

The donkeys were the highlight for Beryl Garcia, 10.

"My hands are a little tired from clapping a lot," she said. "It was just fun."

It was her family's first time at PrideFest.

"I was iffy about coming," said her sister, Tazhianna Cook, 16. "It's nice to see people happy. It's better than I thought it would be."

Their mother, Tarchine Cook, plans to bring the girls back next year.

"It is good that people are able to express themselves for who they are," she said.

Local & St

BRIEFLY

Heart attack kills hiker on Barr Trail

A hiker collapsed and died Sunday morning on Barr Trail as hundreds of runners raced along the path.

Mark Miller, 46, of Colorado Springs was hiking about 8:30

tracks that run behind residences in the 2500 block of East LaSalle Street near Wasson High School.

His identity had not been confirmed Sunday, and an autopsy was planned today, police said.

The death is being investi-

Republicans cash for gove

By KYLE HENLEY
THE GAZETTE